

Cherry Faces the Music

By GEORGE EBERL, Staff Writer



Expressive Cherry Wainer, who was born in South Africa, lets herself go during numbers. With Storer (below), she does a wild "Ebb Tide."



EYES BULGE and eyebrows scoot upward like birds about to take flight. When she smiles, half-moon creases form on each side of dazzling teeth that resemble an advertisement for your favorite toothpaste.

In short, Cherry Wainer owns a banged-topped face that's made for mugging.

What is more, the tiny brunette possesses perhaps the fastest pair of hands and feet ever to extract music from a Hammond organ. One minute she is softly melodious as she runs through a "West Side Story" ballad. Then she switches to trickery, teasing the washing sound of the sea's tides from her keyboard. Next it is the classical field with "Malaguena," and finally, her main forte—jazz—with "St. Louis Blues."

Thus Cherry, an impish, 28-year-old wraith who bills herself as a jazz organist, has become England's contribution to an area of instrumental show biz that Johann Sebastian Bach could never have foreseen.

On the strength of her talents, as well as those of her longtime percussive partner Don Storer, a drummer and comic of considerable ability, she had performed before royalty on television, in a multitude of London clubs, and is currently on a tour that will touch Bermuda and top nightspots in the U.S., winding up with stands in Las Vegas and at Lake Tahoe.

RELAXING before one of her shows, Cherry lighted one of her almost unbroken string of off-stage cigarettes and talked about her career and about audiences.

"Americans make a better audience," she remarked, "They let their hair down more quickly."

Queen Elizabeth's reaction to the jazz organ during Cherry's command performance in Britain?

The South African-born girl shrugged her muscular shoulders, fluttered her lashes, and simulated a polite little pater of applause, leaving a definite suggestion that the royal hair had not been let down.

"But," Storer interposed quickly in his rich slangy British, "she was a queen, she was."

CHERRY, whose 92 pounds and 4-foot-11½ frame is all but lost behind her Hammond, is a non-drinking poodle fancier whose two pets, Michelle and Cleopatra, frequently are on the bench with her when she plays.

The phenomenon of a lady organist had fairly prosaic beginnings. As a young girl, Cherry studied piano and ballet—two artistic disciplines ideally suited as hand and foot training for the Hammond.

After she and her family left Johannesburg and wound up in London, Cherry's father bought her the organ. She was 16. "I was awful, terrible," she recalled. "About all I could play . . ." she began, "was Ethel Smith records," Storer chimed in.

"Ow, you think you're so very funny," she frowned, wrinkling her nose at her drumming companion. "Yes, it's true," she said, fingering the cross hanging from a silver chain about her neck. "I would listen endlessly to the organ records of Ethel Smith."

Miss Wainer and Storer have been together since 1957 and the long association is readily evident both in their sense of timing and in their easy blend of showmanship, from his nonsensical seagull twittering during their rendition of "Ebb Tide" to her abandonment of the organ to join him in a bouncy duet at the drums.

However, away from the stage lights, he continues his tireless clowning while she becomes more straight-faced, displaying a serious side to counter-balance the on-stage flamboyancy.

As successful as the entertainment life has been for Cherry, there has been a frustration (revealed by Storer): "Yes, there's been a great agony in 'er life," Storer said while rolling up the spaghetti tangle of wires leading to the glittering Hammond following their performance. "She always wanted to be five feet tall, but alas, she never made it."

So, the jazz-loving world will simply have to settle for another example of good things coming in little packages.

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